

From: Russ Aaronson
To: Microsoft ATR
Date: 1/26/02 9:33pm
Subject: Microsoft Settlement

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January 26, 2002

Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly
United States District Court for the District of Columbia
333 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20001

RE: US v. Microsoft proposed final order

Dear Judge Kollar-Kotelly,

I teach English and SAT Prep to students at an inner city high school in South Florida. I have reviewed the documents relating to the Microsoft Settlement, and I have found several elements contained within to be highly alarming. I'm certain you have received a considerable number of responses that specifically relate to the language of the settlement, but I would like to appeal to you with a different technique. This letter will provide a few "real world" examples of how Microsoft's policies have hampered students' potential for using new technologies.

On a daily basis, students enter my room to print out documents they created outside the school. They take the documents created with Microsoft Works and try to edit and print them at school, but this never works because Works documents are incompatible with Microsoft's own Office programs that we use at school. Stunned, student after student will ask me how the same company can make two virtually indistinguishable programs on the same platform (again, created by the same company), but neglect to make them work with each other. It never occurs to them that the Works program that comes "free" with the computers their parents purchased is useless for the majority of their schoolwork. Unable to explain the logic or fairness behind this situation, I send them on a scavenger hunt for a working computer with Works installed so they may complete their work.

This is also a situation that the proposed settlement will not remedy. It is difficult enough to help students with programs created on other platforms (though every other platform offers some free, simple method for translating documents back and forth), let alone help them with works created with deliberately handicapped software they were forced to purchase with their computers.

The cost issue also inhibits our ability to make wise software purchases at school. Microsoft's Office suite has always been pricey for education customers, but the new "XP" marketing strategy could make the situation untenable. In a school where it is important to keep every available computer running for as long as possible, the prospects of purchasing productivity software that "expires" when a newer version arrives (or even the prospect of "leasing" software for the same price that used to be required to own it indefinitely) are horrifying. Of course, an educational institution has the responsibility to prepare students for the business world, so we must consider the "industry standard" software, regardless of cost. Put bluntly, this technique places Microsoft's software distribution strategy as the one used by drug dealers who frequent the neighborhood surrounding our school. Again, the proposed remedy does nothing to prevent this situation, and as such, the settlement will prove to be as practically useless as an Office XP install disc will be a year from now.

Furthermore, I cordially invite you to a comprehensive tour of our school and its technological backbone. At Boyd Anderson High School, we take pride in our ability to overcome adversity. I simply wish I could tell my students that their government's concerns about the technological barriers to their success are more important than protecting one of the corporations that creates the barriers.

Hopefully, your judgement will help me change this situation.

Sincerely,

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